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MINISTÉRIO DOS NEGÓCIOS ESTRANGEIROS

Statement by the Foreign Minister of Portugal,
Mr. José Manuel Durão Barroso,
at the Inter-Parliamentary Conference on East Timor
Lisbon, 1st June 1995

Allow me to start by expressing my tribute and thanks to the Portuguese Assembly of the Republic, and in particular to His Excellency the Speaker, Mr. Barbosa de Melo, and to M.P. Fernando Amaral, Chairman of the Select Committee on East Timor, for taking the initiative to convene here in Lisbon at this Conference distinguished participants, coming from all over the world, to discuss the question of East Timor.

On the December 7 this year, 20 years will have passed since the illegal ocupation of East Timor by Indonesian military forces. 20 years during which it is estimated that over 200,000 Timorese, one third of the population, have perished; 20 years during which it is difficult to count the number of political prisoners, of the disappeared, of the persecuted and the tortured people. 20 years of terrible suffering, oppression and abandonment for those who have survived. But also 20 years of determined struggle by a people resisting the oppressor and defending their identity.

On December 7, 1975, the Portuguese democracy was only one year and a few months old, having been restablished on April 25, 1974. Decolonisation was, naturally, one of its central objectives, since it was born out of a wide popular movement against the injustice of the colonial wars in Africa. In East-Timor, a faraway territory where there was neither armed struggle nor political parties, decolonisation meant,first and foremost, to try to find out, first hand, what was the will of its inhabitants, to give them the possibility to create their own political organizations and to prepare an act of free choice about their political future.

Soon it became clear that the aspirations of the main political groupings then in existence were not all the same: some wanted independence; some, integration into Indonesia; and some, association to Portugal, albeit temporarily. Unfortunately, the political passions of some people, the weakness of the Portuguese authority - then going through a turbulent revolutionary period and dealing with the decolonization of all their African territories - and also the opportunity to exploit all those vulnerabilities on the part of third parties, lead to an internal clash which served as a pretext to the invasion and subsequent occupation by Indonesia.

An this is how the Republic of Indonesia, a country which carved out its own existence from a tough struggle for its own self-determination, a founding country of the Non Aligned Movement, forty years after the historical Bandung Conference found itself, ironically, in the unconfortable position of being colonial oppressor of the people of East Timor:

- Indonesia denies the East-Timorese the right to self-determination and refuses to allow the free and valid exercise of that right; but, being ashamed of that, it has therefore thought up the pretext that the people of East Timor have already exercised to right to self-determination in a ghostly event organized by that country in 1976, but never recognized by the UN;

- It rejects the many charges of serious violations of human rights in the territory, but does not allow any investigations by international observers, refusing free access to the territory to international media and human rights NGOs and giving impunity to the main perpetrators of the most serious abuses that it can not hide, such as the Santa Cruz massacre in 1991.

- Very much like the old Portuguese colonial regime overtaken in 1974, it boasts about the tons of concrete and the miles of roads, schools , hospitals, etc, that it claims to have bestowed the people of East Timor ; yet it does not believe that all this has won the hearts and minds of the Timorese, and therefore cannot do without the thousands of soldiers stationed there, in complete disproportion to the peace and tranquility that it claims to exist in the territory.

Mr. Speaker,

Portugal does not deny its own share of responsibility in the process of decolonisation of East Timor, as we have already stated before the General Assembly of the UN. History will also judge the period in which East Timor was under Portuguese colonial domination. In 1974, after 450 years, it is a fact that East Timor was to Portugal a territory that distance made difficult and expensive to administrate. While this may justify accusations of Lisbon's neglect regarding the development of the territory, it had the advantage of resulting in less interference in the daily life of the indigenous population and in more freedom to preserve its identity and culture, its traditional customs and forms of organization.

But the mistakes and the omissions of the Portuguese colonial period or of the decolonization process can in no way be used as a pretext or an excuse for the brutal suppression of the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people of East Timor by third parties. It would be abhorrant and absurd - in the light of the Charter and all the relevant and historic resolutions of the UN - for the colonized people to pay for the colonizer, sacrifying their rights to the interests of third powers.

The brutal Indonesian invasion in 1975 and the subsequent toll of human rights violations resulting from the occupation had the efeect of keeping the link between the Portuguese and East Timorese people more alive than ever, and transforming the fight for the self-determination of East Timor into a question involving constitutional dignity in Portugal and making it a priority of its foreign policy, by each sucessive democratic government, with the consensus of all the forces represented in Parliament.

It would have been easier, and certainly cheaper, for Portugal to behave like other colonial powers in relation to territories where international disputes broke out: to

take a formal stand in the UN, wash its hands in practice, and shrug off its historic responsibilities. But, fortunately, our recently restored democracy did not allow us to distort the most elementary values, nor to ignore the principles of international law.

For this reason Portugal takes up its historical, moral, legal and political responsibilities in accordance with the status of administering power of the non-self-governing territory of East Timor, as reconized by the UN, and it has fought internationallly to defend the interests of East Timor over the years. At stake are the most fundamental human rights of all the East Timorese. At stake is their basic human right, as a people, to the free choice of their political destiny: the right to self-determination.

It may seem strange, in a world contaminated by the virus of "real politik", for a small country like Portugal to commit itself to such a noble and idealistic cause as that of East Timnor. So as to eliminate all doubts, I reiterate here that the objectives of Portugal are not our own interests, besides accomplishing what we regard as being our duty. We feel obliged to defend the interests of those who have not been able to make their voice heard.

Portugal acts only as a kind of "lawyer" for the people of East Timor. It has no sovereignty or other claims in relation to that territory. Its objective is to see the process of decolonization completed through an act of self-determination in East Timor, validated by the UN. Whatever the solution freely chosen by the East Timoreese - independence, integration or association with Indonesia or any other State - Portugal will not hesitate to accept it.

International action taken by Portugal stems from the premise that a military solution to the problem is not be possible. As a country that respects the peaceful solution of conflicts, enshrined in the UN Charter, Portugal rejects that path. Indeed Indonesia has proved throughout the last 20 years, that that way cannot work, for , with every passing day, the Timorese resistence gets stronger.

Portuguese diplomatic action has been developed in two related ways. On the one hand, by using opportunities and international "fora" when the situation of human rights in several countries and regions can be raised, giving information about the situation in East Timor. In this way we try to breach the wall of silence that Jakarta would like to build around the territory.

In this way, Portugal has acted at the UN Commission on Human Rights, the UN Decolonization Committe, in the European Parliament, and within the framework of the Common Security and Foreign Policy of the Eorupean Union, within the framework of EU/ASEAN relations, and also in the bilateral contacts with the authorities of various countries at several levels. Our objective is to call their attention to the need for a political solution for the East Timorese tragedy, with full respect for their legitimate rigts, and to put an end immediately, to the sistematic violation of the most elementary human rights of which they are a victim.

This is also the background for the complaint that Portugal has lodged with the International Court of Justice against Australia on the Timor Gap Treaty. At stake are the respect for the status of the territory, as defined by the UN, and the right of

the people of East Timor to self-determination and to permanent sovereignty over its natural resources, as well as the corresponding duty to see them respected by third parties.

On the other hand, Portugal has, since 1984, taken part in direct talks with Indonesia, under the aegis of the UN Secretary General, according to the mandate he received from the General Assembley through resolution 37/30. Our objective is to achieve a negotiated agreement, in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter and with full respect for the legitimate rights of the Timorese people - which, it should not be forgotten, according to Art° 73 of the Charter, as the rights of a colonized people, should prevail over every other interest.

In the framework of these talks, important measures have been agreed upon, which resulted in a program for family reunification and repatriation of Timorese civil servants of the Portuguese administration. After an inconclusive first phase regarding the core problem, because of a basic divergence between the two Governments over the exercise of the right to self-determination and later over negotiations for a Portuguese parliamentary visit to the territory, a new phase began after the Santa Cruz massacre.

This last phase was started on the initiative of the Portuguese side, which saw the massacre as a demonstration of the need to search for a solution of the core of the problem - the decolonization of the territory - as the only way to put an end to the intolerable situation in the territory in the field of human rights. We have therefore proposed in January 1992 to the Secretary General the reconvening of the talks under his aegis, at a political level, with no pre-conditions other than, naturally, respect for the Charter and international law, in the search for a global, just and internationally acceptable solution of the matter.

As you know, the present stage of the talks has not been easy. Some people are impatient with the modesty of its results. As the opposition between the two Governments persisted, the need arose to adopt "confidence building measures" aiming at closing the gap between the parties and reducing the points of friction, which included those related to the human rights situation in East Timor. As the Secretary General has already stated, the progress of the talks cannot be separated from the improvement of human rights. That is why this question has remained on the agenda of the meetings and has been repeatedly mentioned in the final communiqués.

More recently a positive and meaningful step has been taken. It could be a turning point or at least give an important push to this process. I am referrring to the intra-Timorese meeting that the Secretary General of the UN will organize from tomorrow on in Austria, which was agreed by me and my Indonesian colleague Mr. Ali Alatas. For the first time several East Timorese groupings, from inside and outside the territory, from the resistance and from the pro-Indonesian faction, will meet under the aegis of the UN. The fact that this meeting could no longer be averted or delayed is in itself proof of its importance, no matter how insubstantive its immediate results may seem. Here I cannot but recall the frustrations and difficulties that the parties involved in the Middle East Peace Process experienced at the beginning and the progress which was later achieved.

This question of associating the Timorese resistance to the negotiating process is a decisive one, not only because, without that presence, peace and a global solution for the problem would not be possible, but also because it highlights the international and colonial nature of the conflict. These are notions that Indonesia, although itself may not be ready to admit and may still not yet acknowlege, has demonstrated by the fact that she gave the green light to the intra-Timorese meeting in Austria.

We, Portuguese, do not relinquish our responsibilities. We have always underlined that the problem of East Timor can never be solved through any bilateral agreement between Portugal and Indonesia. Any solution will require as essential elements, first, its acceptance by the people of East Timor, and second, the recognition of its validity by the international community, expressed through the General Assembley of the UN.

This is a problem that belongs to the international commmunity as a whole. The perpetuation of the Indonesian military occupation constitutes a challenge to the international community: it violates international law and international morality, disrespects resolutions adopted by the relevant organs of the UN, ignores all other UN deliberations and the practice that stems from them and clearly jeopardizes the authority of the Security Council.

As in Kuwait, what is at stake is the right to self-determination of a people. As in South Africa in the days of "apartheid" or in Burma today, at stake are also human rights and fundamental freedoms. The fact that East Timor is a non-self-governing territory and not an independent country does not diminish the importance of international pressure to reach a solution of the problem, since the systematic violation of human rights in East Timor is directly linked to the denial of their right to self-determination.

As the human rights situation in any sovereign country can lawfully be the object of international scrutiny, there is all the more reason for a special attention to be given to the situation of the peoples in the non-self-governing territories, who have not did not yet had the chance to choose their political status. As in the case of Namibia before independence, it is fully justified and necessary for the international commmunity to devote special attention to it.

Mr. Speaker,

The cause of self-determination in East Timor has gained international support in recent years, despite the substantial means at the disposal of the Indonesian regime for its propaganda to mystify the problem and confuse the international community. But since the massacre of Santa Cruz in Dili in 1991 - which was one of many massacres, only this time the images brought clandestinely to the outside world and shown in televisions troughout the world - the international public opinion started to pay more attention. The people of East Timor - and in particular the youth - are also demonstrating today in ever more audacious and audible ways.

The meaning of the expression that "a people that oppresses another people cannot be free" is nowadays being more keenly understood by many political and economic groups in Indonesia, joining with all those who aspire to complement the dynamics of social and economic development with more freedom and political openness. In Indonesia, the number of those who see the illegal occupation of the small territory of East Timor as a mistake, damaging both politically and diplomatically to the image of their own country, is growing.

In this light, allow me to greet in a particularly warm manner our Indonesian guests who, despite all difficulties and risks, have decided to be here with us. I am sure that their contribution to the discussions in this Conference will be extremely important for an understanding of various aspects of the problem of East-Timor.

Mr. Speaker,

The international community cannot neglect the evolution of the situation in East Timor and cannot therefore refuse to support the victims of persecution, of arbitrariety and of oppression there. And, as it is obvious, a deeper public awareness of this problem had a decisive influence in the attitude of the different governments, mainly in societies with greater democratic vitality.

This greater awareness on the part of the international community is due, for the most part, to actions by of the media and the commitment of all those who, in civil society throughout the world, fight for justice, peace, development and human rights, as activists associated in non-governmental organizations of universal scope, such as Amnesty International, as well as solidarity groups with East Timor. In the first place we believe that it should be the political representatives elected by the people, yourselves, parlamentarians from so many countries gathered here today, whom I am so pleased to welcome with particular appreciation.

Your action is vital to influence the attitude of the governments of your countries. Portugal, on its own alone, cannot solve the question of East -Timor. Whether to address the question of self-determination or to improve human rights in the territory, Portugal needs the support of the international community, expressed through the solidarity of other governments, parliaments, media, NGOs, universities, unions and public opinion in general. Since East Timor is a question where the fate of a small people is pitted against the political and strategic interests of third parties with undeniable weight in the international arena, effective mobilization of the public opinion is all the more vital.

Allow me to stress here the importance of the support always lent to the self-determination of East Timor by the governments of the African Lusophone countries. Some years ago, when there was less international awareness, the solidarity of those countries was precious - as still is - to ensure that the question was kept in the international agenda, giving diplomatic credibility to the cause of East Timor.

Above I made an allusion to the difficulties that we had in the past in making our position understood and supported, even by our close partners from whom we

have had every reason to expect it. A considerable evolution occurred. But we need more. And therefore we count on your enlighted intervention, Members of Parliament and other distinguished participants.

It is never easy for political authorities to conciliate the divergent interests which sometimes clash with fundamental values and basic principles that reason, experience, ethic and international law impose. Regarding the relationship with potential "Asian tigers" such as Indonesia, once the Cold War logic was set aside, "real politik" is today gaining legitimacy, based on new interests, in particular the"superior" national economic interests.

But even from an economic and utilitarian standpoint, the negligence of fundamental values and principles will incur huge costs in the long run, as history continues to demonstrate. Double standards, in the global village where we now live, can be easily unmasked and turned against their agents.

The position of governments regarding East Timor can be expressed in many ways and in different degrees: in confidential and public démarches, in statements and votes at the UN or other fora and also through specific sectorial policies. With regard to the latter I would like to stress the importance of mobilizing efforts against the supply of military equipment to Indonesia, because the Indonesian military are the ones who have benefitted most from the occupation and exploitation of East Timor. It is immoral to suplly them with the means to perpetuate that occupation and control. Nobody should have any illusions about the worthlessness of any guarantees that have been given.

I earlier called the cause of East Timor "noble" and "idealistic". Let me make it clear that these words do not entail any lack of realism regarding the objectives of that cause. I am firmly convinced that the self-determination of East Timor will be a reality. A few years ago the self-determination of Namibia, the independence of Eritrea and of the Baltic countries, the evolution in Palestine and in South Africa did not seem realistic. Nevertheless, these realities are now before your eyes. That reinforces our confidence and determination to continue to act in defense of the just cause of East Timor.